



“I felt like the district was going out of its way to avoid this club, to avoid gay students, which, bluntly, is pretty ridiculous.”

— Palmer teacher Fran Lindau

Out on a limb

How District 11 derailed student clubs in a costly crusade against gay teens — all in the name of education.

By Cara DeGette and Kathryn Eastburn

On Tuesday, May 24, Palmer High School seniors celebrated a rite of passage at the World Arena: graduation to the real world.

The 376 graduates included foreign exchange students, children of immigrants from across the world who are now American citizens, African-American and Hispanic students, jocks, nerds, chess geeks, intellectuals, beauty queens, freedom fighters, evangelical Christians, agnostics, Jews, Muslims and, yes, gay and lesbian teenagers.

Also among the graduating seniors and the crowd in the stands were plaintiffs in an ongoing lawsuit against D-11, accusing their school district of violating the federal Equal Access Act of 1984 for its continuing refusal to allow a Gay-Straight Alliance as an official club.

Over the past six years, students have petitioned three different Palmer principals, seeking recognition of a Gay-Straight Alliance that would, if approved, become just one of some 3,000 such sanctioned clubs across the

United States, including 50 in school districts across Colorado.

The clubs are designed to provide forums and a support network for gay and straight students alike. Palmer's club, as envisioned by its founders, would be a place for guest speakers, discussions and civic involvement.

The GSA plaintiffs declined to be interviewed due to a group agreement not to speak to the press as long as the court case is active. But plaintiff Sara Thomas, who now attends college out of state, described the intent of the club in the March 18, 2003, edition of the Palmer newspaper, *The Lever*: “Creating a Gay-Straight Alliance is not about promoting, condoning or condemning homosexuality. It is about treating our fellow students with respect. A Gay-Straight Alliance will help establish an atmosphere of tolerance, which is consistent with [the state of Colorado's] legislatively mandated anti-bullying programs.”

But in Colorado's fourth largest public

continued on pg. 16 →



Students joined a counterdemonstration earlier this year when Westboro Baptist Church members came to Colorado Springs to protest at Palmer High School over the Gay-Straight Alliance.

school district, the idea of sanctioning such a group is apparently anathema, though administrators have never fully explained why they are so opposed to officially recognizing the club.

Neither have district officials explained their willingness to commit so many taxpayer resources — \$250,000 in legal fees alone so far — trying to block the GSA in court. They have refused to disclose their efforts to involve Colorado Springs-based Focus on the Family or the Alliance Defense Fund, a right-wing law firm that Focus CEO James Dobson helped found 11 years ago, in the litigation.

And, nearly two years later, they have not clarified their willingness to suddenly deny other longtime clubs from official recognition at all five of the district's high schools as a direct result of the lawsuit.

Target of attack

History might provide a clue to the district's logic.

In 1996, reporter Mary Margaret Nussbaum wrote a story for the Palmer paper *The Lever* about the difficulties that gay teenagers experience.

When Will Perkins, local car salesman and former chairman of Colorado for Family Values, learned of the article, he coordinated a campaign that all but brought the district to its knees.

CFV — once an influential organization that sponsored the anti-gay Amendment 2 in 1992 — launched a "PROTECT THE CHILDREN" campaign calling for the district to enact a policy for "every aspect of school life which discourages experimentation with any kind of promiscuous sexual activity, promotes abstinence, and affirms traditional marriage." Thousands of signatures were collected on postcards that were distributed in churches; dozens of critics flocked to board meetings demanding the policy be adopted.

Kent Olvey, then the D-11 board

president, said he believed that student newspapers should reflect the "traditional Judeo-Christian, heterosexual standard of the community and not

In a recent correspondence to the *Independent*, D-11 spokeswoman Elaine Naleski claimed that Palmer High School's refusal to allow the

"I have heard about Focus on the Family or other organizations that may help with the legal fees, where are we on that issue?"

D-11 School Board President Sandy Shakes, in a Feb. 11, 2004, e-mail

give credibility to other lifestyles."

D-11 ultimately declined to adopt the policy and the hoopla died down.

Three years later, Palmer student Dolores Garcia applied to form a Gay-Straight Alliance at Palmer, and then-Principal Jay Engeln turned the request down flat. In an interview at the time, Engeln claimed that if the school were to allow clubs with no direct ties to the school's curriculum, then it would potentially be forced to "open the door to all clubs, even those fostering messages of hate." It was the first time that requirement had been suggested, and, at the time, the school notably continued to sanction other clubs with little or no connection to the school's curriculum, including Dance/Drill team, Chess Club and the Mountain Biking Club.

Since then, Palmer students have repeatedly requested that a GSA be recognized as an official club; they have been consistently shot down.

The two-tiered system

In December 2003, seven Palmer High School students, including Sara Thomas, filed a lawsuit accusing the district of violating the Equal Access Act of 1984.

Gay-Straight Alliance was actually mandated by federal law.

"In accordance with the school's obligations under the Equal Access Act," Naleski wrote, "student groups not directly linked to the curriculum are not given the same full spectrum of privileges that are given to student groups that tie more directly to the school's curriculum."

Actually, the Equal Access Act mandates no such requirement. Instead, the law specifies that districts cannot discriminate against certain student groups. If some clubs with no direct ties to the curriculum are allowed, then all of them must be. If, on the other hand, school districts allow only student clubs with direct ties to the curriculum, they are not subject to the terms of the Act.

After the lawsuit was filed by Alfred McDonnell, a cooperating attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, D-11 administrators responded with haste. Rather than accepting the Gay-Straight Alliance, they announced that only those student clubs with direct ties to the school's curriculum would be "officially" recognized.

Now, other independent groups — including the Gay-Straight Alliance — can still meet at Palmer, but they can-

not use the school's public address system to announce meetings nor use the school's equipment and resources, including computers and paid faculty advisers. Their ability to announce meetings is restricted to one bulletin board in the school. They cannot be recognized as clubs in the yearbook.

In all, nine clubs at Palmer found themselves relegated to the newly invented second-tier status.

"Reclassifying the other clubs had a lot of repercussions," said Jessica Sidman, who was a senior and the editor of *The Lever* at the time. "It made it difficult for [unofficial clubs] to meet; it was hard to advertise. They put up a completely useless community bulletin board with nothing on it in a feeble attempt to solve the problem."

"My personal opinion is that the administration handled the whole thing very poorly."

Though noncurriculum-related clubs had existed and thrived in district schools for decades, Norm Ridder, the district's recently departed superintendent, claimed the two-tiered system doesn't actually represent a change in policy, but is merely a clarification of the district's existing requirements.

Palmer High School was affected immediately; groups like Book Club, the Dance/Drill Team, and Interact, a volunteer community service organization, were suddenly denied official recognition. Interact was declassified, along with the Chess Club and Mountain Biking Club. Other clubs that administrators determined could not tie directly to the school's curriculum included the Ultimate Frisbee Club, the B-9 Task Force (which is devoted to fighting breast cancer), the Sci-Fi Club and Unified Sports.

The change was later extended to Doherty, Wasson, Mitchell and Coronado high schools in April of 2004. At Wasson, the African-American Forum, Fencing Club and Latino Club, among others, were reclassified. Mitchell's Recycling Club, Environmental Club, Step Team, Chess Club and Drill Team were denied official school recognition.

Districtwide, 29 clubs were declassified.

In a recent interview, Palmer principal Reynolds said she fully supports the new standards. Even if the GSA lawsuit hadn't already been in motion when she became principal in 2003, she says she would have taken steps to separate the independent clubs from the officially recognized student groups.

Yet Reynolds, along with other administrators, initially insisted that some clubs with no clear ties to the curriculum were indeed curriculum related.

In the Nov. 25, 2003, Palmer *Lever* — before the lawsuit was filed — Reynolds was quoted as saying, "Chess is actually part of the curriculum in some schools. So even though Palmer does not offer that class, it is still part of the curriculum."

Reynolds' predecessor, Jackie Provenzano, also tried to argue that chess club — as well as the school's Mountain Biking

ing Club and several others — had direct links to the curriculum. According to records obtained under Colorado's Open Records Act, in a May 6, 2003, letter to Bill Hochman, the chairman of the local chapter of the ACLU, Provenzano suggested that the Mountain Biking Club supplements "actual courses of study" at the school and thus is curriculum-related. "The club offers students a wholesome recreational opportunity with other Palmer students after the school day," she wrote. "The club certainly extends and supports existing curriculum."

Others, like the Future Business Leaders of America, are directly tied to the school's "business curriculum," Provenzano maintained in that same letter. The volunteer club Interact was certainly tied to both the Current Issues curriculum, as well as government courses, she said.

No room for controversy

Through it all, Sidman said, administrators at Palmer never explained to students their rationale for taking away the clubs' official status. "I have my own opinions about what it was; I think it was a political agenda."

But publicly — other than Engeln's initial claim that allowing gay students to form a club at the school could open the floodgates to groups like Hitler Youth of America — district administrators and members of the elected school board have remained silent.



Sara Thomas is one of seven students who filed a lawsuit against District 11 after Palmer High School rejected a Gay-Straight Alliance for students.

Since the lawsuit was filed, a gag order has been in place prohibiting anyone at the district from discussing the issue.

The district's motivation can be glimpsed, perhaps, in a June 12, 2004, memo from D-11 Executive Director of School Leadership Lou Valdez to Ridder, six months after the lawsuit was filed.

The memo addressed the need for revisions to the altered policy regarding student clubs.

"Among other things ... schools will be able ... to deny sponsorship to clubs which have potential to create controversies within the community or among parents and/or students that would distract the school from its primary educational mission," Valdez wrote. "These objectives can only be

accomplished legally if the District sponsors curriculum related student groups only."

Palmer teacher Fran Lindau put it a bit more succinctly.

"I felt like the district was going out of its way to avoid this club," she said, "to avoid gay students, which, bluntly, is pretty ridiculous."

And bottom line, using Engeln's hate group analogy, the change in policy would still allow a Nazi club to form at Palmer High School, if students were so motivated.

"Well, yeah, I suppose that's probably true," said the school's current principal, Karin Reynolds.

Asked whether Engeln's basic argument was the rationale for the most recent denial of the Gay-Straight Alliance, Reynolds said, "I can't answer that question right now."

End run around the board

In April 2004, after the lawsuit had been filed and D-11's new student club policy was announced, the school board formed a Student Group Task Force. The group was composed of community members, as well as administrators and the district's outside legal counsel, Stuart Lark of the law firm Holme Roberts & Owen.

Greg Borom, then the director of the community organization Citizens Project and a committee member, said his — and other members' — understanding

was that they were to review the proposed policy and report their recommendations back to the board.

Indeed, on April 28, board member Karen Teja said she looked forward to hearing recommendations from the committee.

But when the group met two weeks later, they were informed that they were only to approve or offer suggestions regarding language, not to make recommendations for change. And though the district insisted that the policy on student groups was merely being cleaned up, the community members viewed it as a significant alteration in the way student groups could be recognized.

Frustrated, the community members met independently and compiled a report for the board. Among other things, the task force concluded that "the proposed policy threatens the existence of noncurricular clubs." Members urged the board to "make a conscious choice whether or not to adopt this change with an understanding that it may have a significant impact on student morale within the District."

The district, the community group argued, has for decades — at least back to 1970 — recognized noncurricular student organizations as officially sanctioned clubs.

When the citizens' group presented their report, Borom said they were

continued on pg. 18 →

RIDEFINDERS

BIKE WEEK

June 18 - 25, 2005

JOIN US FOR A WEEK OF GREAT BICYCLE EVENTS!

JUNE 18 STARLIGHT SPECTACULAR RIDE
A midnite ride to benefit Trails & Open Space Coalition

JUNE 22 WOMEN'S BEGINNER BIKE CLINIC!
6:00 pm - 8:00 p.m. Downtown location.
Call for info. Space is limited.
Free, but reservations required.

JUNE 24 (FRIDAY) FREE BREAKFAST & BIKE TO WORK DAY
Note the new day and multiple locations!
Reservations are required
3 locations this year, same time 6:30 - 7:30 a.m.
Pioneers Museum downtown,
Salsa Brava and Wild Oats
Businesses — sign up for the
Corporate Challenge competition!

JUNE 25 FREE BICYCLE & TRAILS FESTIVAL
10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. at Confluence Park, downtown
(S. of Colo Bridge). Music, food, booths, speakers, kids' zone.
Bring your family and friends and ride your bike down!

By Amy Martin

Call for reservations, event details, and dates of
Colorado Springs Cycling Club Social Rides

RIDEFINDERS (719) 385-7431
www.springsgov.com

Feeling Bloating?

Start Losing weight today with Hoodia!

- For effective appetite control
- As featured on CBS's 60 minutes
- Fools the body into feeling full
- A South Africa cactus, researched by Pfizer
- SAFE herbal supplement ~ not a stimulant
- 100% Hoodia (don't be fooled by extracts)
- \$29.95 ea. Buy 2 and save \$5

Sage Woman Herbs

308-A South 8th Street • Behind the Pink La Casita
473-9702 • www.SageWomanHerbs.com

Independent May 26-June 1, 2005

Heavy reading

Despite secret vetting of students' stories, *Lever* coverage complete

The saga over student clubs and the Gay-Straight Alliance had student journalists on their toes, and the massive coverage in the Palmer High School newspaper, *The Lever*, is testament to their gumshoe reporting.

But they were unaware that central administrators and possibly the district's lawyer — the same man litigating the GSA lawsuit — may have been reviewing their stories before they went to print. And in one case, a story was altered, without the students' knowledge, to reflect the central administration's perspective.

Between January 2003 and the end of this school year, *The Lever* devoted considerable space to the issue. Reporters focused mainly on the lawsuit itself, the subsequent club restructuring and a wide variety of student responses.

Jessica Sidman, editor of *The Lever* during the 2003-2004 school year, said she was aware that the newspaper's faculty sponsor, Todd Hegert, showed Principal Karin Reynolds drafts of articles prior to publication. But she was under the impression that it was "just as a courtesy."

E-mail correspondences between Reynolds and Hegert — some of them copied to D-11 administrator Lou Valdez and lawyer Stuart Lark — illustrate the district's actual influence and Hegert's determination to keep his students' stories pure.

On March 4, 2004, Reynolds asked to review drafts of articles "dealing with the ACLU/GSA issue" for the upcoming student newspaper: "As you might imagine, things around this issue are ever-changing, so I want to be sure that your staff is able to provide the most accurate information that is available while being sensitive to the needs of the entire community."

The next day, Hegert agreed to provide drafts of the students' news stories, which were scheduled to run in the March 18 issue of the newspaper. For the first time, the issue over Lark's involvement was mentioned.

"I'm fine with fact checking to ensure accuracy in the stories," Hegert wrote. "As you can probably understand, I do not like the idea of district lawyers review-

ing the stories. I don't want them shaping our coverage to the advantage of one side of the case any more than I would want ACLU lawyers editing the stories to their advantage. Not that I can imagine the *Lever's* coverage making a difference in the outcome of the suit."

A little more than an hour later, Reynolds wrote back, again noting that the intent of the exercise was to assure accuracy: "I must tell you that I believe that our attorneys are honest and fair — I would be hesitant to share with them when I have questions if I didn't believe that."

A week went by before Reynolds sent another memo to Hegert, this time asking him to "adjust" two paragraphs in a story in accordance with a request from administrator Valdez. The story in question detailed the reclassification of clubs at Palmer and whether the policy would affect other schools.

The requested changes in the story appeared in the newspaper, along with a direct "quote" from Valdez that was not collected during the student reporter's interview but instead was crafted by the district.

Most newspapers do not allow the subjects of their reporting to supply their own quotes or review and rewrite portions of independently reported news stories. In an interview last week, Hegert said he did not know for sure whether anyone other than Reynolds had vetted the stories. But, he pointed out, the altered paragraphs comprised only a small portion of the overall coverage.

Upon learning of the administration's involvement, Sidman said she was disappointed. "It would have been better if we'd known, because then we could have pointed out that it was an official statement." Overall, though, the alteration had little impact on the newspaper's coverage, she said.

In fact, the student newspaper staff received a statewide award from the Colorado Press Association for its sustained coverage of a single topic.

— Cara DeGette

→ continued from pg. 17

elated when the policy discussion was tabled — then were shocked when the board casually approved an administrative action by superintendent Ridder that effectively ratified a sweeping change in policy without a formal vote by the school board.

"It's infuriating," said Borom. "You've still got a policy on the books that reads as if this is the policy the district has had for many years, a policy that has allowed many student groups to flourish, but now [those student groups] are no longer school sponsored."

"Our recourse as citizens should be with an elected board, but they've created a buffer around the administration and have managed to change policy in a way that makes it more difficult for the community to have access or input."

A quarter million and climbing

Meanwhile, the district was working to engage the help of Focus on the Family, the Colorado Springs-based evangelical Christian ministry that maintains homosexuality is a sin and can be "cured." Its founder, James Dobson, is also a founding member of the Alliance Defense Fund, a Scottsdale, Ariz. Christian law firm whose main two issues of litigation involve abortion and homosexuality. According to the Washington D.C.-based watchdog group People for the American Way, "[The Alliance Defense Fund is] particularly tireless in attacking any and every attempt by gays and lesbians to have families, domestic partnership or civil unions, or be protected from discrimination in employment or housing."

On Feb. 11, 2004, board president Shakes sent an e-mail to her colleagues and other top D-11 administrators: "I have heard about Focus on the Family or other organizations that may help with the legal fees, where are we on that issue?" Three days later, superintendent Ridder responded, notifying the board that he had met with two representatives

Date Night DOWNTOWN

5:30 pm • IL Vicino
11 S. Tejon St., 475-9224

Hand-tossed wood-roasted pizzas...
a romantic Italian aphrodisiac!

Local Tip: Kids get complimentary "play" dough!



8:00 pm
Pikes Peak Center
190 S. Cascade Ave., 520-7469

Let George soothe your soul with his melodic magic.

Local Tip: The Center is world-renowned for its acoustical excellence.



10:45 pm
Jack Quinn's Irish Pub
21 S. Tejon St., 385-0766

Cozy up into a private nook with a couple stouts!

Local Tip: Must see: "Keltic KerryOKEE" every Sunday, 9pm to 1am!





PIKES PEAK CENTER PRESENTS
GEORGE WINSTON
COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO
TUE JULY 12, 2005 8:00 PM

Downtown Colorado Springs
A World of Possibilities
Supported by the Downtown Partnership

Allergies? Asthma?



PIKES PEAK

Allergy & Asthma, LLC

Get the professional
care you deserve.

(719) 593-1234

(Call to schedule an appointment)

www.peakallergyasthma.com

Mixed messages

The two voices of Palmer
Principal Karin Reynolds

On Jan. 14, 2004, Palmer Principal Karin Reynolds sent the following internal e-mail to several district administrators, describing her frustration over the Gay-Straight Alliance issue embroiling the high school and the district's policy guiding student clubs:

"I have been frustrated, frankly, with my directive of silence — otherwise, I would have held forums with students, parents, etc; to get a better sense of where we are here at Palmer. Until the district provides direction (and that should be soon), I hesitate to make any statements from our DAAC [a community advisory committee] that gives the media more to mess with — if you know what I mean. Currently I remain concerned that we keep the processes in place to keep our students learning and the culture healthy during what could be a difficult time of debate. Additionally, **we are not allowed to speak about the issue at all to the media — that includes all employees of D-11.**"



Three months later, in an April newsletter to the "Palmer Community," Principal Reynolds made no mention of the requirement of secrecy over the student club issue:

"This is a time of challenge for the Palmer community as we face debate about closed and open forum issues regarding student organizations and clubs. **Most importantly to me is that we continue to honor one another, support our students and engage in open and honest communication.** I am certain that the Palmer Tradition of Excellence will remain unscathed because our students, staff and parents appreciate the diversity of our community. I am so proud of our students because they know just how to treat one another while engaging in necessary debate; that is what makes Palmer so rich. I hope that you will call on me with any questions or concerns — **my door is always open.**"

from Focus on the Family, and that "they are working with [the district's lawyer, Stuart Lark] on the Palmer case."

Ridder later testified in court that Focus didn't end up contributing money toward the district's defense in the lawsuit. The district's June 29, 2004, grant application to the Alliance Defense Fund, seeking to offset the costs of the lawsuit, was rejected later that summer, on Aug. 10. But it appears Ridder didn't inform the board of the ADF's decision — nor clarified that district taxpayers were footing the legal bill — until seven months later.

At this year's March 30 board meeting, members expressed surprise when they were asked to transfer \$200,000 from the General Fund to help defray the district's mounting legal bills, mainly associated with the Palmer lawsuit.

Director Eric Christen said he thought the Alliance Defense Fund was covering the costs of the lawsuit; Ridder told his bosses that the application for funding had actually been rejected. He indicated that he had "thought" he sent an e-mail informing the board of the news, but Christen, along with other board members, insisted they had never seen Ridder's claimed correspondence and asked for a detailed accounting of the litigation costs the district had accumulated.

This month, in response to a request filed under Colorado's Open Records law, the district's custodian of records, Deb Key, said Ridder never sent the requested information to the board — neither before the March 30 meeting nor after it was specifically requested by elected board members.

As of March 31, Key said the school district had paid nearly \$250,000 in legal costs related to the Palmer High School litigation and student club policy, not including the amount of D-11 staff time spent on the issue. The district has refused to provide billing documents detailing the work done so far.

Also this month, District 11 refused a request to review a copy of its application to the Alliance Defense Fund, claiming that the documents constitute "attorney-client or work product privilege."

'They tend to be bright'

On February 20, 2004, Principal Reynolds sent a letter to Palmer staff and students, explaining the fallout of the ACLU lawsuit and the rationale for the new two-tiered club system as mandated by the district.

History teacher Lindau gave the letter to her seventh period advanced placement history class to discuss.

"They saw right through it," said Lindau. "They said, 'This is obviously an attempt to avoid recognizing the Gay-Straight Alliance.' They tend to be bright and to recognize a political issue when they see one."

But when Lindau gave the letter to her first period freshman history class, the response was different.

"They saw it as gay kids trying to

continued on pg. 20 →

Sencha is ready for summertime.

Come join us in the restaurant or on our relaxing garden patio for happy hour with delicious original cocktails, or a dinner that will excite and delight your hungry palate.

Our ingredients are all natural, and we use locally grown and raised products. You haven't truly dined out until you've experienced our eclectic and award winning cuisine.



Sencha's new hours:
Monday thru Thursday - 4 - 10 p.m.
Friday and Saturday - 4 - 11 p.m.
Happy hour daily from 4 - 6 p.m.
331 South Nevada Avenue 719.632.8287

La Casita
PATIO CAFE
ALL FRESH - ALWAYS!

THERE'S A WHOLE LOTTA BORRACHO GOING ON.

Get your borracho on with our special borracho beans, made daily from the freshest ingredients and seasoned with just a touch of beer.

Eight Street & Highway 24 719-633-9616	East Woodmen & Rangelwood 719-536-0375	North Nevada & Garden of the Gods 719-599-7829	North Academy & Carefree 719-574-1499
--	--	--	---

Searching for an after-school or summer job?

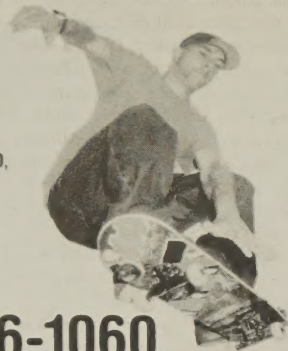
We have what your looking for!

Full and part time door to door sales jobs available **right now!** And you could earn \$100, \$300, or \$500 plus per week!

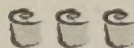
If you are neat, honest and can talk to people this could be the job you've been waiting for.

Transportation helps but is not required

Call today! 266-1060



For the love of Sushi.



Now Featuring "Little Mermaid"
(Baked scallops in shells, with crab,
spicy mayo, tobico topping)
Ask for Chef's Surprise Roll!!

Ai 愛
SUSHI & GRILL
JAPANESE RESTAURANT

4655 Centennial Blvd.

(at Garden of the Gods)

266-5858 or 266-6644

Lunch: Mon-Fri. 11am-2:30 pm

Dinner: Sun.-Thurs. 5-9:00pm Fri-Sat 5-10pm

→ continued from pg. 19

kill their clubs," said Lindau. "I spent an entire period trying to diffuse that."

The Lever's Sidman, among others, said that the decision to declassify some Palmer clubs, which came more than halfway through the school year, upset many students. The day the two-tiered system was announced, for example, the Palmer yearbook staff learned they would have to yank seven clubs out of the book. In the March 18, 2004, *Lever*, yearbook editor Haley Finley expressed her disappointment.

"It seems like we're pretending that [the clubs] didn't exist," she said. "They deserve recognition."

In the same issue, sophomore and Dance/Drill Team member Courtney-Rose Harris was quoted saying that the resulting morale among the dance club was low.

"As a group, we've decided that we don't want to participate in any of the assemblies or official school functions anymore because we feel we're not recognized as an official part of the school any longer," Harris said. "After being downsized, nobody wants to do it anymore."

Other students quoted in that and other news stories indicated their opposition to the Gay-Straight Alliance, claiming the club was unnecessary. Others said the decision was no big deal. But in at least two instances, the fallout was important.

The Interact Club, for example, disbanded because its sponsoring agency, the Rotary Club of America, required the group, whose members do volunteer work in the community, be officially sanctioned by the school.

In a March 12, 2004, e-mail message to Principal Reynolds, teacher Timothy Scott detailed the future for the Mountain Biking Club, which he sponsored. The top frustration was that the decision made budgeting, organizing and communicating less easy. Additionally, Scott noted, the club would undoubtedly suffer because, along with a loss of official status came the loss of sponsorships.

"We can't cite ourselves as members, or sponsors of anything official ... at least that is my understanding," Scott wrote. We can't legitimately ask for racing/organized club discounts, in an already expensive sport.

"For some of the race level/competition level kids, this also affects their ability to enter races because they lose an official connection which would make them eligible for race sponsorship."

As for the Gay-Straight Alliance, students report that recent meetings have been sparsely attended, and the club has dwindled, which in the minds of history teacher Lindau, is a shame.

"If the district's best interest is really the best interest of the kids, which they're always saying, they should recognize the GSA," said Landau. "It's pretty easy math. If one out of ten teenagers is gay or questioning his or her sexual orientation, that makes 200 kids at Palmer who might need some guidance and understanding."

**WHEN PEOPLE ASK
WHAT YOU'RE DOING THIS
WEEKEND,
IMPRESS
THEM WITH THIS
LITTLE GEM.**

GRAND OPENING

Paint Mines Interpretive Park, Calhan, Colorado

Saturday, June 4, 2005 — 10:30 a.m.

Call 719-520-6375 for More Information

Not your everyday park, Paint Mines Interpretive Park is 400 acres of prairie open space with colorful rock outcroppings. The Paint Mines are named for the clays collected by American Indians to make paint. The eroded badlands geology makes this one of only three such areas in the United States. From Colorado Springs, take Highway 24 east to Calhan, turn right (south) on Calhan Highway, and left (east) on Paint Mine Road. The main entrance to the park is on the left. Follow the signs for parking for the opening ceremonies.

Colorado Lottery proceeds — \$79,000 through Great Outdoors Colorado — have gone into the purchase of Paint Mines Interpretive Park.



Your ticket to a more beautiful Colorado.

Keeping the faith

On Tuesday, May 17, as the 2004-2005 school year drew to an end, Palmer High School students received their yearbooks. Missing were the clubs that were reclassified as independent student groups a year before. Eighteen clubs, not including curriculum-related groups like Marching Band and various choral and instrumental music groups, were photographed and officially recognized, down from 25 in the 2003 yearbook.

Still, one colorful two-page spread — titled “Keeping the Faith: Spirituality around Palmer” — stood out, not in the Clubs section but rather the Organizations section. Photos depicted Christian students wearing crosses and declaring their beliefs. Prominently placed was a photo of student David Poole, his eyes closed and hands raised in ecstatic prayer. Poole’s religious student group, Abestos, meets Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Palmer teacher Lindau and numerous students say this school year, as the GSA lawsuit raged on, Abestos was frequently allowed

access to the school’s public address system, as well as the school television program.

And to a casual observer, several officially recognized clubs that appear in the Organizations section — Crime Stoppers, Drive Smart (for safe driving awareness) and the International Diversity Council — have no clear ties to the school’s curriculum.

In a farewell column in the opinion section of the May 17 special edition of *The Lever* last week, graduating senior Lauren Goulding, who has covered the Gay-Straight Alliance issue for the past year, weighed in on her experience.

“The last two years have been good to *The Lever*,” said Goulding. “The GSA lawsuit, the reclassification of Palmer clubs, the stream of fanatical protesters, and the endless foibles of the school board have produced a journalistic candyland of things to be angry about.

“But good years for journalism don’t always mean good years for students. I see at Palmer an increasing degree of devotion to bureaucracy that seems to

be smothering the good things about our school.”

Goulding went on to question the apparent contradictions in a school and administration that touts tolerance and diversity through “canned speeches” over the school’s PA system but won’t recognize a Gay-Straight Alliance.

“Of course, administrators cite fears that an open-forum policy would allow neo-Nazis to form clubs and use school resources,” wrote Goulding. “If we’re really as tolerant as the letters sent home to our parents say we are, what are they worried about?”

“I wish our administrators had had the courage to actually support diversity at our school instead of just using it as a catchphrase for public relations.”

On the page of the *Lever* where graduating seniors bequeath such things as lockers, laughs and memories to those left behind at the school, Goulding willed Principal Reynolds the following legacy: “No comment, no comment, no comment, no comment, no comment, no comment.” □

Timeline

• **January 1999:** Students request official recognition of a Gay-Straight Alliance at Palmer. Then-Principal Jay Engeln denies the club. Administrators say the group can’t be recognized because it is not curriculum related, despite the fact that other student groups without ties to the curriculum are meeting.

• **April 1999:** The ACLU sends letter to school board president and D-11 superintendent seeking official recognition of the Gay-Straight Alliance.

• **May 1999:** D-11 counsel responds, saying D-11 doesn’t allow any noncurricular student groups and therefore would not officially recognize the GSA.

• **January 2003:** Sara Thomas organizes GSA group and, on Jan. 24, formally applies for official student group status at Palmer. Principal Jackie Provenzano rejects the application, suggests that Thomas become involved with Palmer anti-bullying policy. Ms. Hergert, coordinator of anti-bullying policy tells Thomas she wasn’t sure Palmer was ready to support a GSA group.

• **May 6:** Provenzano writes letter to local ACLU chapter chairman Bill Hochman, defending status of certain clubs, arguing they are curriculum related.

• **Aug. 5:** Hochman sends letter to now-Principal Karin Reynolds asking for recognition of the GSA. Reynolds says she’s reviewing the information and will get back to the students by Sept. 1. In an e-mail to D-11 administrator Marvin Adams, Reynolds says, “I do not feel it important to act on this ASAP, but more important to me is that I represent the District and get your advice before doing so.”

• **Dec. 13:** With the help of ACLU cooperating attorney Alfred McDonnell, seven students file suit in federal court against Palmer High School for refusing to recognize the GSA as an official school club.

• **Dec. 13:** Elaine Naleski, D-11 spokeswoman, tells the *Denver Post* that Palmer High School administrators “have decided not to recognize clubs that aren’t curriculum related. Therefore, based on that criteria, they have denied [GSA] recognition as a school-sponsored club.” Karin Reynolds, in the *Post* on the same day, says it was the district’s decision.

• **2004:** International Diversity Council organizes at Palmer and is formally recognized by the school. Purpose: “to promote an open environment for all races and cultures.”

• **Feb. 12:** District responds to lawsuit with a “tight crackdown on information pertaining to the suit,” according to *Lever* reporter Lauren Goulding. “Because of liability issues, district administrators at all levels, including the Superintendent himself, refuse to discuss the suit. Teachers have been instructed not to talk about the lawsuit with their students.”

• **Feb. 20:** Reynolds informs staff and students of reclassification of noncurricular clubs as independent student groups, including B-9 Task Force, Book Club, Chess/Strategy Club, Dance/Drill Team, Interact, Mountain Biking Club, SciFi Club, Ultimate Frisbee Club and Unified Sports. The letter says the groups may continue to use school facilities to meet and may post notices on a designated bulletin board.

• **April 28:** D-11 forms a task force, composed of community mem-

bers and administration representatives. Stated purpose: “to clarify the current student organization policy.” Board member Karen Teja, approving the committee, says she anticipates receiving its recommendations.

• **May 12 and 18:** D-11 administration and lawyers, according to the community task force members, “attempted to redefine the committee’s charter, to confine its focus to a narrow reconsideration for the working of a new proposed student organization policy, and to limit formal recommendations to the board.”

• **June:** Some members of the task force draft and submit to the board their own report on student groups. Questioning the district’s motivation, the members insist the administration’s proposals represent sweeping changes and inconsistencies and deserve more public input and scrutiny.

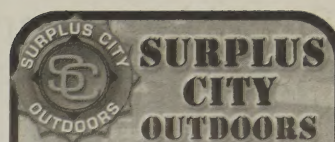
• **June 22:** Lou Valdez sends memo to D-11 superintendent Norm Ridder, clarifying and offering suggestions for Ridder’s proposed changes to the district’s policy regarding student groups.

• **June 29:** The district seeks funds from the Alliance Defense Fund to pay for legal expenses.

• **Aug. 10:** The Alliance Defense Fund rejects District 11’s application.

• **January 2005:** Norm Ridder, on the stand in Denver, says he feels “there was confusion at Palmer as to the district’s closed-forum clubs policy. I suggested we stay with precedent and policy.” Interpretation of the policy as it already existed, he says, was the problem.

• **March 30:** Ridder informs board that the district, not the Alliance Defense Fund, is paying the legal costs.

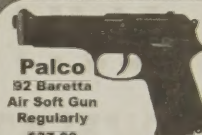
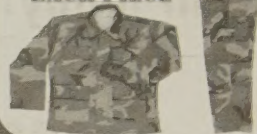


YOUR ONE STOP FOR MILITARY SURPLUS & OUTDOOR GEAR

• FISHING GEAR • SUMMER CARRIARTY • CAMPING & HIKING

KIDS BDU CLOTHING

\$15.95 EACH PIECE

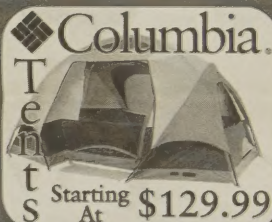


Palco 92 Baretta Air Soft Gun Regularly \$27.99

On Sale \$19.99*

*Limited Quantities

2000 Count Neon Orange or Blue .12g, 6mm BB's Only \$7.99* Regularly \$9.99



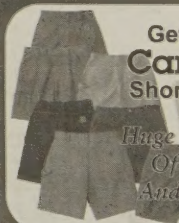
Starting At \$129.99

LODGEmtg.com

Cast Iron



For Your Camping Culinary Needs



Get Your Carhartt Shorts Here

Huge Selection Of Styles And Colors

2732 W. COLORADO AVENUE
Corner of 28th & Colorado

(719) 634-1264

Hours: M-Sat 9-6 • Sun 10-5
www.surpluscity.com

7DaysToLive

Dude, where's my guitar?

Air guitarists compete for regional title

Since SNL's "Wayne's World" heyday, air guitar, with roots running deep to the yore of mullet-propelled Cameros, has enjoyed a quiet revival. In 2003, The U.S. of Rockin' A finally joined the world air-forum, exporting

lifestyle — my morning is 3 p.m., you know," says Pulley. "I do my Yngwie (Yngwie Malmsteen's "Queen in Love"), and then the judges pick "Black Betty" (by Ram Jam) for round two; it was as bad as playing Nelly's "Hot in Here" with a banjo and calling that air guitar."

Air guitar officiating operates on the same scoring system as figure skating. To qualify in the first round of a regional, air guitar competitors perform one minute from a song of their choice. A panel of judges then selects a "surprise obligatory" song to which the top five contestants, in the order they qualified, must improvise. Each region's winner advances to the national contest, and from there the victor flies to Finland to represent the Stars and Stripes.

As an extra perk, this year's Rocky Mountain regional runner-up will walk away with a mint condition 1962 Gibson hollow-body air guitar.

The air guitarists are judged on three criteria: technical merit (convincing fretwork in sync with the music), stage presence (rocking the crowd) and "airness" ("the extent to which a performance transcends the imitation of a real guitar and becomes and art form in and of itself"). From headbanging and fallen-knee mock solos to absurd costumes and exposed flesh, performers with Finnish dreams leave no tricks unexploited.

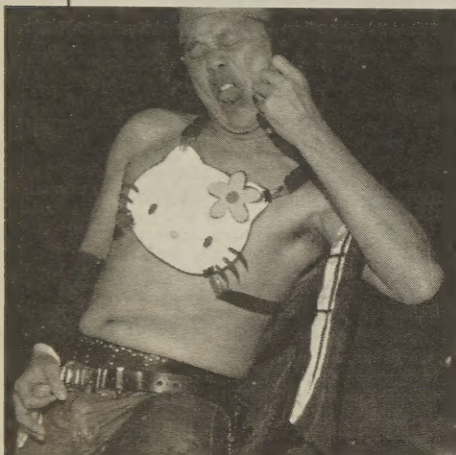
Other stipulations apply to air guitar competitions as well, such as the following, set forth by the Air Guitar World Championships: "Personal air roadies are allowed, but they must leave the stage before the performance begins."

"This event is pretty insane," says hi-dive's Matt LaBarge. "Last year we completely sold out. We had contestants venture all the way from New York and Alabama to compete. They air-guitared AC/DC, Iron Maiden and 'Dueling Banjos,' even 'I'm All Out of Love' by Air Supply. Then I gave them Van Halen's 'Eruption' to sort them out in round two."

Pulley stole the show, thanks to his swift Eddie Van Halen impersonation.

"I did this (played air guitar) for hours and hours back in the '80s. I don't want the glamorization behind it; I don't want to be labeled 'air guitar,'" Pulley says, "but I've got a following now on the Internet."

— Matthew Schniper



David "C-Diddy" Jung, winner of the 2003 World Championship, shreds with a little help from Hello Kitty.

David "C-Diddy" Jung to compete for the international crown in Oulu, Finland, where the World Championships have taken place since their birth in 1995. The result? Lady Liberty, care of Jung, nabbed the 2003 title, and in 2004 MiRi "Sonyk-Rok" Park defended it, setting 2005's hat-trick stakes as critical, if not nationally deflating.

"I could smoke anybody in the world; no one can do what I do," says 2004's Rocky Mountain Regional Air Guitar champ Jesse "Demon Strait" Pulley, who lost tragi-controversially to Park in the nationals.

This year's regional competition takes place on Friday, May 27, at the hi-dive on the increasingly hip stretch of South Broadway in Denver.

Last year, Pulley, with the encouragement of family and friends in Mobile, Ala.,

competed unsuccessfully in Chicago before earning a meal ticket out of Denver to the national gig, where it all came to an end.

"Here's the deal: I'm 40; I don't have kids; I live a rock 'n' roll

26 Thursday

This weekend, check out *The Rainmaker*, a tale of love and hope and sundry heartwarming devices, at the **Lon Chaney Theater** (221 E. Kiowa). Lizzie, a plain-Jane homemaker, is caught in a small town drought. Into said small town swoops the charming, dazzling and, most importantly, titular Bill Starbuck, who along with rain brings excitement and romance. Yowza! The curtain goes up tonight, tomorrow and Saturday, with additional shows on June 3, 4 and 5. Tickets are \$15 general admission and \$12 for seniors and students. For reservations or more information, hit up www.starbarplayers.org or call 573-7411.

27 Friday

Catch Irish-Scottish powerhouse duo **Willson and McKee** tonight at the Black Rose Acoustic Society Open Stage. Back for their third appearance at BRAS, the pair presents traditional Celtic arrangements, glorious vocal harmonies and a night full of guitar, bouzouki, accordion, bodhran and folk harp. Their press photo looks like an advertisement for Wholesome Family Dulcimers, Inc., so it's a fair guess that the kids are welcome at this one. The show starts at 7:30 p.m. at the **Black Forest Community Center**

(corner of Black Forest and Shoup roads in Black Forest). Admission is \$5 for nonmembers and \$3 for BRAS members, with kids under eleven admitted free. For more, check out www.blackroseacoustic.org.

28 Saturday

The days are getting longer and warmer, the lilac is blooming and it's becoming more apparent that summer's upon us. You thinkin' what we're thinkin'? Rodeo! Catch the first of the season at the **Norris-Penrose Event Center** (1045 Rio Grande St.), where the **Circle Bar Rodeo** is going on today and tomorrow. Events include a barbecue and concert at 6 p.m., and a city-wide memorial service tomorrow at 2 p.m. — these in addition, of course, to flyin' horses, rough stock and chaps, chaps, chaps! Admission is \$12 for adults, \$6 for kids 12 and under, free for kids under 5 and \$10 for active military with ID. Head to www.circlebarrodeo.com to learn more.



Swedish sassypants the Shout Out Louds sashay into Colorado this week.

CAPSULE

2005 Rocky Mountain Regional Air Guitar Competition

hi-dive, 7 S. Broadway, Denver

Friday, May 27, 8 p.m., 21+

Tickets: \$7 cover, free for participants; call 720/570-4500 for more or e-mail matt@hi-dive.com for info to compete.